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In the Footsteps of Christ (6)

IN THE PREVIOUS article, the footsteps of Christ, as foretold by the prophets of God, inevitably led to the city of Jerusalem. Here Jesus would spend his last few days, before those agonising final steps took him to Golgotha where he gave his life upon the cross.

We also considered his glorious entrance into Jerusalem to the shouts of the people: 'Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' [*Matthew 21.9*] We followed the footsteps of Jesus into the temple courts where he overthrew the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those that sold doves. Once again he was in conflict with the religious leaders in the court of the temple and his words condemned them for their hypocrisy.

The religious leaders hatched their plan to get rid of Jesus and they plotted to kill him secretly, which involved the bribing of one of Jesus' closest disciples, Judas. From now on, as shown in the Scriptures hundreds of years beforehand, the fate of Jesus was sealed, according to the words of the prophets of Israel - but could Jesus go through with it?

THE FINAL DAY

The day began like any other day and throughout Jerusalem, the thoughts of the people were on the preparation work for the coming feast of the Passover. Little did they know that before that day ended Jesus would be arrested, to be subjected to an illegal trial and condemned to death. A day like any other day, except to Jesus, who now knew that his ministry had but hours left. We can imagine the amount of work which he had to do in that one day. We see the effect

of that day on the disciples of Christ. Towards the end of the day they were unable to keep awake whilst Jesus prayed, their eyes were so heavy.

‘GO AND PREPARE US THE PASSOVER’

Luke tells us that it was the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed and Jesus sent two of the disciples, Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover. This was a strange request on the face of it, since Jesus did not have a base within the city of Jerusalem itself. *‘Where wilt thou that we prepare?’* asked the disciples, puzzled at this suggestion. [Luke 22.9] Jesus told them to enter the city, where a man would meet them bearing a pitcher of water. They were to tell him that the Master requested the use of his guestchamber to eat the Passover. The sight of a man carrying a pitcher of water was an unusual one, since it was the custom for women to carry out such tasks. The disciples obeyed, met the man and permission was freely given to use the large upper room. The two disciples then had the task of spending some time in the ritual cleaning of the room and to prepare for the feast of the Passover.

Meanwhile Jesus no doubt used his final hours in teaching and healing, knowing that shortly this work must cease. He would have to put his life and his labours in the hands of his Father with the words *‘I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.’* [John 17.4] The Gospel writers also show us that on this final day, Jesus gave his ‘farewell’ teaching messages to his disciples, reminding them of his coming death, teaching them to obey his commandments and warning them of conditions which would affect their lives after his death.

‘NOW WHEN THE EVEN WAS COME...’

The evening drew on and with it the last hours of freedom for Jesus, who with so little time left, had one final act to perform - to partake of the Passover with his disciples. *‘My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples’*, Jesus had told his disciples to say to the man carrying a pitcher of water. [Matthew 26.18] *‘My time is at hand’*. - How that expression hid the extreme pressure on Jesus, as he now faced the ultimate test. His three years ministry had brought him hardship and discomfort, but no doubt coupled with

exhilaration at the healing and the raising of the dead. The years had brought closeness to the Father, who he loved with all his heart. Now he was exhausted, his body had been broken to the will of his Father and his thoughts were now concentrated on the final ordeal which would take away from him his very life. Could he go through with it? What would happen to his little band of faithful followers who had forsaken all to follow him?

His last few hours were therefore to be spent away from the crowds and in the partaking of a new feast with his disciples - a communion feast, a feast of fellowship and love, a feast that has been celebrated for nearly 2,000 years by those who truly follow Jesus - the breaking of bread and drinking of wine.

There were two obstacles needing attention before Jesus was able to partake of the feast with his disciples. The first was that the disciples had been disputing among themselves about who should be the greatest. The second was that Judas was still with the disciples and Jesus knew of his mission to betray him.

THE LESSON OF HUMILITY

Jesus countered the first obstacle by teaching them that the greatest among them should be as the younger and he that is chief, as he that serves. [Luke 22.26] Jesus gave them the powerful example of his own attitude as he rose from the table, stripped off his outer garments, took a towel and wrapped this around him, and then poured water into a basin. We can imagine the disciples' reaction as he did this, wondering what he was about to do. Then imagine their thoughts as he knelt in front of each of them in turn and washed their feet, wiping them with the towel with which he was girded. Consider their thoughts as their Lord performed this act, normally reserved for the lowest of servants. Peter could not take this lesson and he tried to prevent Jesus from washing his feet saying '*Thou shalt never wash my feet*'. Nevertheless, Jesus demonstrated the lesson of humility, which all disciples of Christ must exhibit in their service day by day. [John 13.3-17]

The second obstacle, that of having Judas among them, was overcome by Jesus stating openly to all the disciples prior to supper, that one of them was going to betray him. We can visualize them looking around at each other, suspecting one another and even questioning their Lord with the words '*Is it I?*'

[Mark 14.19] But Jesus knew who it was - the trusted treasurer who had their funds and whose love of money far outweighed his loyalty to Christ. This disciple Judas, would be one of the least suspected of this gross crime and yet by dipping the morsel of bread into the bowl with Judas, Jesus was able to show some of the disciples who the traitor was. Judas, now unable to control himself, rose from the table and left the room. *'That thou doest, do quickly'* said Jesus to Judas as he left the room. [John 13.27] Again the disciples were perplexed, for they still did not understand that it was Judas who was to be the betrayer.

The remaining disciples shared the bread, the symbol of the body of Christ, and afterwards the wine, the symbol of his shed blood. At the same time, Jesus promised them that he would no more partake of that feast until that future day when they would join him in the feast in the kingdom of God. After this he gave further words of comfort to them and when they had sung a psalm, they went out to the Mount of Olives. By this time the pressure on Jesus was immense, for he knew what lay ahead of him.

IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Having left the upper room, they came to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus gave the disciples a warning. He told them that they would be offended because of him that very night and they would be scattered as sheep, without their shepherd. They were in no doubt as to what he meant by this statement, which was followed by the reassuring words that, after he was risen [from the dead] he would go before them into Galilee. This tells us clearly that Jesus expected to die very shortly. At the suggestion by Jesus that the disciples would be offended, Peter vehemently denied the possibility, saying that even if all the other disciples should desert Jesus, he would never do so. *'Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death'* was his confident statement. [Luke 22.33] Jesus, of course, knew that although the spirit may be willing, the flesh on this occasion would be weak and the scriptures must be fulfilled. Afterwards we learn that *'they all forsook him, and fled'*. [Mark 14.50] Jesus also told Peter that even before the cock crew in the morning, Peter would deny him.

Jesus and the disciples now passed over the brook Kidron and entered the

Garden of Gethsemane, where he often went. Indeed, it would have been a pleasant place to be. Thickly covered in olive groves and other vegetation, it would make a lovely setting for an evening. However, not on this occasion for Jesus, as the climax of his ordeal drew nigh and he had now so little time left for prayer and meditation. Leaving the other disciples, he withdrew from them a little way, taking with him Peter, James and John. At this stage Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy. He now left his closest disciples a little way behind and fell on his face in prayer and supplication to his Heavenly Father, with the words '*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*' [Matt.26.39]

Coming back to the disciples, Jesus found them asleep and said to Peter, '*What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*' Indeed they were exhausted and as Jesus remarked, '*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*' Jesus himself, now tried to the limit and exhausted, went aside to pray to the Father again, the only source of strength under extreme trial. This time, acknowledging that God's purpose must be accomplished through his death, he ended the prayer with the words '*thy will be done.*' [Matthew 26.40-42]

Coming back to the disciples, Jesus found them asleep again and so he left them to resort to prayer the third time. At this stage he was in an agony and his sweat was as it were '*great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*' [Luke 22.43,44] Here in his agony, an angel of God appeared to him, strengthening him. How often do we find this reflected in the lives of God's faithful followers over the centuries. When there is no strength, when there is no help, then God's angels give strength and comfort. As we read in the Psalms, '*The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*' [Psalm 34.7]

Going back to the disciples, he again found them asleep and he woke them with the words '*Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*' Jesus had hardly spoken these words when he was interrupted by the sound of a large crowd approaching, led by a familiar figure, Judas. Approaching Jesus, he greeted him with a kiss. '*Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*' Jesus asked, knowing in advance that it was he who would be the betrayer. There was a small skirmish as Peter, realising that Jesus was now about to be arrested and forcibly taken away, drew a sword and cut off the right ear of the servant of the

High Priest. We see here in the actions of Peter, his willingness at this stage to defend his Lord, even though not in the right manner. Jesus stopped him and in an instant touched the ear and healed the man. The disciples then forsook him and fled. He was now alone with his captors. His hour had come. [Luke 22.46-53]

THE ARREST AND TRIAL

The men who came with Judas were armed with swords and staves, yet Jesus was not going to resist arrest, as he told them. The scriptures had foretold that Jesus was to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and now the time had come for this to be fulfilled. He had not yet been found guilty of any crime worthy of death and in any event, the Jews were not allowed under Roman law to put a man to death.

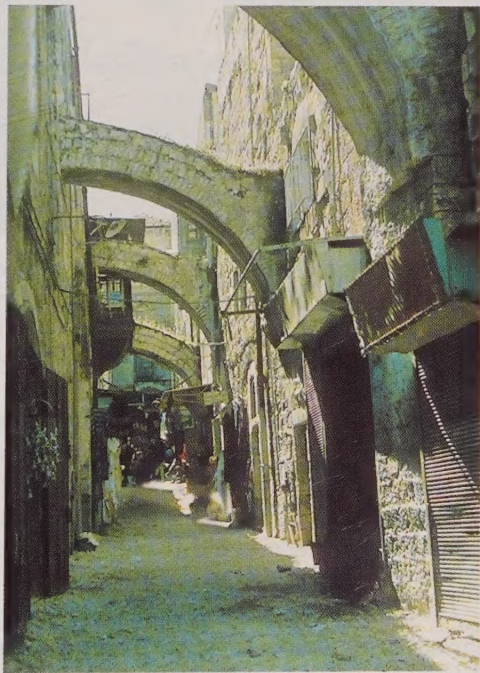
Jesus should not, under Jewish law, have been subjected to an illegal trial during the night. But so keen were the religious rulers to put him to death, that they had already arranged a meeting at the palace of the High Priest Caiaphas, where they had assembled the scribes and elders. They also brought forward false witnesses whose testimony did not agree, so that there were no real grounds for carrying on with the trial. There were no legitimate charges and there was no case to answer!

A question was then put to Jesus, which he answered truthfully and which enabled them to detain him further. The question was *'tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.'* This Jesus answered in the affirmative, since he is indeed Israel's Messiah, the Son of God, not God the Son and part of the Trinity, as many people believe today. His answer gave them the loophole they needed, causing the high priest to accuse him of blasphemy, and he was then subjected to physical abuse and they spat in his face. Jesus was condemned to death, as far as the authorities were concerned. [Matthew 26.63-68] It is at this point that Peter was also accused by some of being with Jesus, but he strongly denied the fact. Peter, a man so strong when not under trial, so certain that he could give his life for Jesus, now distanced himself from his Lord – then the cock crew, and Jesus looked at Peter, who went away, weeping bitterly. [Matthew 26.69-75]

After the mockery of a trial, which lasted all night, Jesus was then, in the early hours of the morning, taken before Pilate. Since the Jews had no power under Roman law to put any to death, they needed Pilate's authority to go ahead with the death sentence. Pilate, against his better judgement, not heeding the warning given to him by his wife and contrary to his own views that Jesus was innocent, was forced to condemn Jesus to death. The Jewish authorities had blackmailed Pilate to condemn Jesus, saying that if he let Jesus go free he was not a friend of Caesar. Pilate had no choice. An innocent man was now to be crucified and yet that was nothing new. Pilate was told by Jesus that he could have no power at all against him, unless God had given him such power and now in fulfilment of God's purpose, Jesus stood a condemned man.

'AND THEY CRUCIFIED HIM'

Jesus was now exhausted, having been tried, condemned, physically abused, flogged and mocked. As if this was not enough, he was made to carry the cross to the place of execution. We follow his footsteps, seeing him stumbling under the load, his wounds making the tortuous journey to Golgotha an agonising one, until they compelled a man called Simon to bear the cross instead. The scene that followed is a harrowing one. Therefore we will spare the reader the terrible details of crucifixion, the pain endured by Jesus as he was now nailed to the cross and as he hung there for all to see. *'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.'* [John 17.4], Jesus had said. On that cross



Via Dolorosa - Alleged route of Jesus to his crucifixion

God's redemptive work through Jesus was accomplished, as there he hung and there he died, a sacrifice for sin.



Gordon's Calvary - The Place of the Skull - Suggested as one of the possible sites of the crucifixion of Jesus.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

So far in this series of articles we have followed the footsteps of Christ, from his birth, through his younger days, through his baptism, and then throughout his ministry of about three years. We have seen him tirelessly carry out his Father's work, we have listened to his teaching, we have seen his miracles and we have joined him among the crowds and in solitude.

His footsteps have led us through the deserts, up high mountains, in pastures green, by the sea side, in the wilderness, among the Gentiles and finally to Jerusalem - the city of God. It was inevitable that his footsteps would end in the city of God, as foretold by the Old Testament prophet. [Zechariah 9.9] There the

final footsteps of his ministry ended as he was lifted up upon that cruel cross. Many who had witnessed his work and his words had now called for his death. Even his disciples had hidden themselves in terror. A small group of women who he was closest to, looked as he hung upon the cross. John, the disciple who Jesus loved, accompanied Mary the mother of Jesus and they too stood by the cross.

To many people, Jesus' life was at face value, a failure but our final glimpse is the sight that Jesus saw as he hung on the cross and as he looked for pity, but found none. He looked to his right and to his left. Two thieves were crucified one on each side of him and whilst the crowd derided Jesus and tormented him as he hung there dying, one of those thieves made a plea to Jesus. As Jesus faced him, the thief looked at him and said, '*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*' Here was a convicted thief, a sinner, who truly reflected on his own life and realised that his death was a just punishment for his crime. Jesus answered his request with a promise, that he would receive a place with him in his kingdom; for indeed he had come into the world to save repentant sinners. [Luke 23.39-43]

The words of the Roman centurion, who was stationed near the scene and who saw the death of Christ reveal to us his conviction:

'Truly this man was the Son of God.' [Mark 15.39]

This would be re-enforced in the miracle of his resurrection which we will consider in the final article in this series.

Clive Brooks
Horsham, Sussex

COVER PICTURE

THE ARRIVAL OF spring in Holland, is accompanied by an abundance of spring flowers as seen in our cover picture. The Dutch bulb growers are renowned for their cultivation of spring flowers and the world famous Keukenhof Park provides admiring visitors from all over the world with a riot of colour at a time of the year when many trees and plants appear lifeless following winter.

The miracle of new life from the ground is a demonstration to us of the promise of God. In the New Testament we are reminded of this in the words of the Apostle Paul in that chapter dealing with the resurrection:

‘When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body... So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;...’ [1 Corinthians 15.37,38,42,43 NIV Schofield Bible]

The fulfilment of God’s promise has been guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For those who truly follow him there is real hope for the future as the Apostle Paul puts it: ‘*Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him*’ [1 Corinthians 15.23 NIV] In other words, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the miraculous power of God, his true followers can look forward to the same. So next time you gaze on the beauty of spring flowers and the recurring miracle of new life, think about God’s promise of future life - and ask yourself a question:

Do I belong to Christ?

Editor

Bible Manners and Customs

The Eunuch

THE EUNUCH WAS a familiar figure in Bible times. There are twenty three direct references to eunuchs in the entire scriptures and more by implication. The usual meaning behind the description 'eunuch' is that of a man of authority and trust, who has significant responsibility for his master's household. Another and similar title is that of the chamberlain, of which there are a few examples in the Bible. The translation from either the Hebrew or Greek text to the English word chamberlain has the meaning of a person of royal authority and there is to this very day such a post in the English Royal household - Keeper of the Queen's Bedroom.

There are two words in the Bible with which we are mainly concerned here. In the *Hebrew* the word is *saris* and has the primary meaning of a court officer. In the *Greek* the word is *eunochos* and may be derived from the idea of being a keeper of the bed or bedroom. Again this refers to the responsibilities of a senior domestic officer, though not without some exceptions.

Both the *Hebrew* and the *Greek* original words have another meaning, that of *the castrate*. Today, this would be rightly regarded as a barbaric practice as a means of ensuring that a servant's mind would be concentrated more upon his master's service and affairs, than his own pleasures. *Eunuchs* were normally placed in charge of the Harem of an Eastern potentate, for the simple reason that such a man would be unlikely to betray his master's trust. There is no doubt that some of the Biblical references to *eunuchs* are to *castrates*, though it should not

be assumed that all references to these men of authority are that they were such. We are more interested in the example set by these people and in the very powerful lesson which Christ brings out in his teaching in the suggestion that his followers must *all* become spiritual eunuchs, if they would serve him faithfully. We shall come to this point later.

LESSONS FROM THE LAW OF MOSES

It is important to recognise that God did **not** look with favour upon those who mutilated their bodies or the bodies of others. His instructions in the law given through Moses, were that no cutting of the flesh was permitted, with one important exception, that of male circumcision. Circumcision was required of all Jews who came into covenant relationship with Almighty God and to this very day Jewish boys are circumcised on the eighth day. This custom will be the subject of the next article in this series, God willing, for it too has powerful lessons for followers of Jesus Christ.

God had otherwise made it very clear:

'Ye are the children of the LORD your God: **ye shall not cut yourselves**, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.' [*Deuteronomy 14.1,2*]

The nations living in Canaan prior to the occupation of the land by Israel, practiced cutting of the flesh and other abominations which were forbidden practices to God's people who were to be holy, separated to His service. Later on, Israel disobeyed these instructions and followed the practices of the nations around them, particularly in following the priesthood of Baal, which entailed considerable mutilation of the body, as this example taken from the history of Israel shows:

'And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.' [*1 Kings 18.28*]

All these priests of Baal, who had turned their back upon the true God, later perished. Not one escaped Divine justice at the hand of Elijah the prophet. We can be sure, therefore, that the practice of the enforced eunuch did not have the approval of Israel's God. However, let's look at just two examples of eunuchs in the Old Testament to begin with.

THE PROPHET DANIEL

It was because of the sins of His people, that God caused them to be taken into captivity. First of all the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, progressively took God's people into bondage. One such notable captive was the prophet Daniel and his companions of noble descent. The King of Babylon knew that among the Jews there were talents to be made use of. This after all, was the nation that under their wise king Solomon, had prospered greatly and to whom the Queen of Sheba had come to learn of the God-given wisdom of Solomon and his scholars. It would be sensible for Nebuchadnezzar to make the best use of the Jewish scholars he had taken into captivity, so he put them in the charge of a man named Ashpenaz:

'And the king spake unto **Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs**, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.' [Daniel 1.3,4]

Some writers, notably the Greek historian Herodotus, have suggested that Daniel and his companions thus became eunuchs and also *castrates*, though the evidence rather suggests this is not the case. They were, the Scripture tells us: '*children in whom was no blemish.*' Neither should we assume the same for Ashpenaz, for whom the title '*Master of his Eunuchs*' may simply mean that he was a court official of considerable authority. The lesson from Daniel's experiences is that although he served a number of the kings of Babylon and Medo-Persia, he had above all things separated himself to the service of God. As a result of this, God blessed him even in captivity. He is described as a man '*greatly beloved.*' [Daniel 9.23]

EBED-MELECH THE ETHIOPIAN

The last of the kings of Judah, Zedekiah, is recorded as having a eunuch in his household and again, he would appear to be a senior domestic officer rather than a castrate. He was a good man and the prophet Jeremiah had reason to appreciate his kindness. Due to his forthright condemnation of the king described by the prophet Ezekiel as '*thou profane, wicked prince of Israel*' [Ezekiel 21.25], Jeremiah was placed in a dungeon from which he was rescued by Ebed-melech:

'Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, **one of the eunuchs** which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.' [Jeremiah 38.7-13]

We warm to this kindly eunuch and his act did not go unrewarded by God. The Almighty knew what was to happen to Zedekiah's kingdom and in the ensuing siege of Jerusalem. He took steps to protect this faithful man Ebed-melech, who was not a Jew, but probably a captive from Ethiopia, perhaps even a *castrate*:

'Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But

I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: **because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD.**’ [Jeremiah 39.15-18]

If Ebed-melech is accounted worthy of a place in God’s Kingdom, it will be a pleasure to meet him. Later on in this article we shall consider another Ethiopian eunuch.

AN EVERLASTING NAME

The prophet Isaiah records the Word of God towards His people in which God makes use of the *castrate eunuch* as an example of faithfulness. A eunuch in the fullest sense of the word, was effectively prevented from having descendants by natural descent. In Isaiah, such men are described aptly as dry trees:

‘Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, **I am a dry tree**. For thus saith the LORD unto **the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths**, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an **everlasting name**, that shall not be cut off.’ [Isaiah 56.1-5]

All the elements associated with the eunuch are presented so beautifully in this passage. The eunuch presented a sad figure without the prospect of a natural seed or descendant and yet God said to His people that **they ought to be eunuchs** in dedicating themselves to His service and not simply pleasing themselves. Keeping God’s commands has a far more enduring reward than having sons and daughters, who after all, may or may not serve God faithfully. Our children can deeply disappoint us just as Israel disappointed the Almighty. Obedience to the covenants of promise made first to Abraham, forms the basis

of the gospel of the kingdom of God and has a far greater reward - '*an everlasting name.*'

Notice the clear reference to the *castrate* - '*that shall not be cut off.*' These words have a far reaching consequence concerning the Son, of God, which we must now consider.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

The prophet Isaiah links the work of Christ to that of a eunuch. Not that Christ was mutilated in any way, for as the Lamb of God, he was without blemish. Christ fulfilled the *type* of the eunuch in dedicating himself to the service of his Father in heaven. Christ did not have a natural wife, because as the Scripture plainly teaches, his bride to be is spiritual, the ecclesia for whom he gave his life in his great sacrifice for sin. This beautiful analogy **and its future reality** is set out in Christ's parable of the virgins, to whom it was announced, '*Behold, the bridegroom cometh.*' [Matthew 25.6] So, the seed or descendants of Christ are spiritual, rather than by human begetting on his part. We are not natural descendants of Christ, but we must become spiritual descendants through belief and baptism, and prepare ourselves for '*the marriage supper of the Lamb.*' [Revelation 19.6-9]

With this background in mind, let us consider what Isaiah has to say:

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? **for he was cut off** out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken....Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, **he shall see his seed**, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.'

[Isaiah 53.6-11]

Here was a man cut off from the land of the living, with no natural seed to succeed in his place and yet, unlike the eunuch, **he would see his seed!** Christ's true descendants will give him great pleasure in the kingdom of God, for they will constitute '*the travail of his soul.*' His sacrifice for them will not have been in vain. Christ indeed made himself, as it were, a eunuch for the sake of you and me, if only we will recognise it!

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Now we turn to another eunuch from Ethiopia, this time in the New Testament, at the time when Christ's Apostles and disciples were preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. Philip is one such disciple and he met the man who was, in modern parlance, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His name is not given - he is simply, a '*eunuch of great authority.*' Here we have the prime example of a eunuch. A man greatly trusted by his employer, totally to be relied upon. If he was an Ethiopian by birth, it seems he was also a Jewish proselyte, as he had been to Jerusalem to worship God. He may also have been a physical eunuch, as we shall see:

'And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Under-standest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.' [Acts 8.27-31]

The eunuch was reading from Isaiah chapter 53 as we have it numbered in our English translations. This was the chapter which the eunuch did not understand. It seems reasonable from the account which quotes particularly the phrase: '*who shall declare his generation?*,' that the eunuch was puzzled how a man could be cut off and yet see his offspring. Modern translations, though sometimes written in less attractive prose, nevertheless make it quite plain: '**who can speak of his descendants?...For he was cut off from the land of the living....**' [Isaiah 53.8 NIV] If the Ethiopian was a physical eunuch, he *would* be puzzled. Philip explained it all to this man and later on, he was baptised into the saving name

of Jesus. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing, to work out his own salvation in fear and trembling. This man, if he were a castrate, was barred from the assembly of the Jews under the Mosaic law, as we read in the book of Deuteronomy to which the reader is directed. [Deuteronomy 23.1] Now, under Christ's law, eternal life beckoned to him and to any others whose physical condition barred them from the congregation of Israel, under the old covenant which could not give life.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

As if to emphasise that the old law was about to be removed by his death upon the tree, Christ used the impossible position of the eunuch to illustrate that for any who are prepared to put him first in their lives, access to life eternal is assured. The disciples were finding some aspects of Christ's teaching a real test of their faith, particularly that which related to marriage. The sentiment expressed by some was that perhaps, it would be better not to get married.

Christ's rejoinder was extremely to the point:

'All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.' [Matthew 19.11,12]

So, the true follower of Christ must be prepared to give up everything to follow him. As Jesus made clear, anyone who wants to be a true disciple must be prepared to forsake all. It doesn't matter what we might covet in this life, nothing must come between us and our service to the one who gave his life wholly to his Father's will; then sacrificed his life for our sakes.

Are **you** able to receive this?

David Evans
Sidcup, Kent

GREEN ISSUES AND EARTH SUMMITS

HARDLY A DAY goes by without some publicity being given to 'green issues' or in other words, addressing the way modern man is polluting the planet he lives on. Over five years ago a conference was held in Rio called the First Earth Summit, where world leaders met and pledged to do something to deal with this problem. Not long ago, the Second Earth Summit was held in New York and more recently there was a third summit in Japan. Once again calls were made by world leaders to the industrialised nations to cut back on polluting gasses that adversely affect the world's climate.

'Global warming' is a phrase used in the media to describe the effect these emissions have on our atmosphere. The question is, will all the well-meaning words have any effect? Will anything be done to solve the problem?

The Bible's view is that *'It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps'* [Jeremiah 10.23 NKJV] The 'Green' groups and others say the conferences produce very little action anyway! The accusation is, that since the first Earth Summit held in Rio, the situation has got worse. America, the richest nation in the world, has refused to sign up to targets considered necessary to cut down the polluting effect from our homes, our cars and our factories. On top of this we have fast developing industrial countries such as China and India which are not particularly interested in new approaches to industry and non-pollution measures. Their aim is to copy the wealthy nations and rapidly increase the wealth and prosperity of their peoples. The already prosperous nations are reluctant to accept alterations to their industrial output that may lose jobs for their populations and political votes.

So if man will not do it, who will? The Bible tells us that God has plans to intervene in the affairs of this world. He will send Jesus again to *'destroy those who destroy the earth.'* [Revelation 11.18 NKJV] The return of Jesus Christ to the earth is promised, to set up God's kingdom. At that time the earth will be filled with God's glory by the healing work of Jesus, when he rules from Jerusalem.

'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days...out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall

judge between the nations...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares.' [Isaiah 2.2-4 NKJV]

The present order of things will pass away, the problems of the rule of mankind will end. There will be no more need for Earth Summits to talk about these problems. The administration of the world-wide government of the kingdom of God will be with divine power.

'The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD...with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...'
[Isaiah 11.2-4 NKJV]

Reader - place your trust in God, not in the empty promises of men!

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent



View over the area of Gibeon

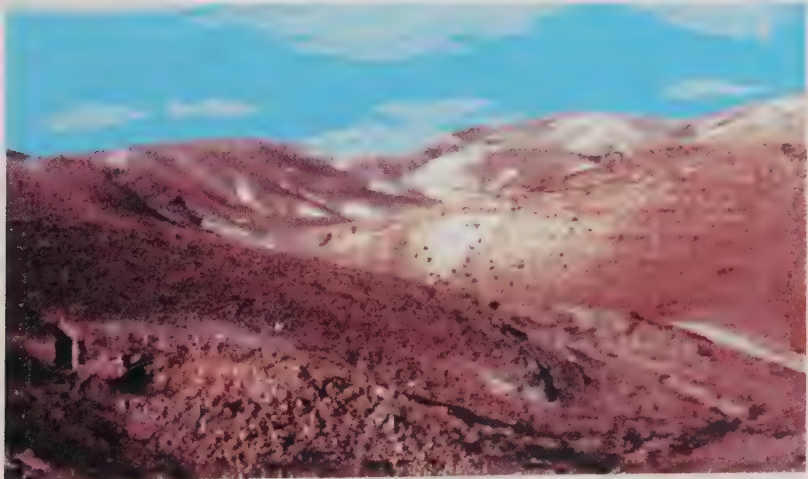
Parables of the Kingdom

The Nobleman

ALL THE PARABLES of Jesus are characterised by great economy of words. These simple stories powerfully convey many important aspects of his teaching in a way which captures the imagination of the listener. The inquiring student will discover hidden meanings and lessons to heighten his interest and appreciation of the teaching of Jesus. Like a master artist Jesus could paint graphic pictures to enforce his preaching of '*the gospel of the kingdom of God.*' [Mark 1.14]

BACKGROUND TO THE PARABLE

Jesus spoke this parable to the crowd as he left Jericho to journey up to Jerusalem for the last time before his crucifixion. Luke is the only gospel



The view towards Jericho in the wilderness on the road from Jerusalem

writer to record this parable [Luke 19.11-27], and he states that Jesus introduced it at this juncture *'because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.'* [Luke 19.11] In the mounting crisis, there was evidently a general expectation that Jesus would assert his right to sit on the throne of David there and then, vanquishing the occupying Romans and establishing the kingdom of God. Luke describes how Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem riding a colt, accompanied by the loud shouts of an enthusiastic crowd, *'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.'* [Luke 19.38]

Within a week of his arrival, at his public trial before Pilate, Jesus was to bear witness to his kingship, [John 18.33-37] foretold by the angel before his birth. [Luke 1.30-33] Later that day he was crucified and over the middle cross outside the city, was displayed the challenging title:

'JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS'

[John 19.19]

As the King of the Jews, Jesus is identified in the parable with *'A certain nobleman (who) went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.'* [Luke 19.12]

Jesus never discounted the conviction of his followers, that he would *'restore again the kingdom to Israel.'* [Acts 1.6] The story of the nobleman enforces the truth that the kingdom of God was not then imminent. A long interval had to elapse before Jesus returned from heaven, the *'far country'* of the parable to accomplish all things at his second coming. [Acts 1.10,11] Remember his promise that, *'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'* [John 14.3]

THE NOBLEMAN'S INSTRUCTIONS

Before the nobleman left for the far country, he called his ten servants. Each was given a pound and told to *'Occupy till I come,'* or as the New International version puts it, *'Put this money to work...until I come back.'* [Luke 19.13] In the nobleman's absence the servants were expected to render faithful, responsible service: not simply maintaining possession of their master's property, but using

it to gain by industry and trading, an increase and profit on the original sum of money. At his return, the nobleman, having received for himself the kingdom, makes a final reckoning of the trading results achieved by each servant.

Unlike the parable of the talents, where the number of goods given for trading varies [Matthew 25.14-30], in our story each servant is given the same amount. The pound fittingly represents the common blessing of the Gospel. Jesus, as the earth's future king, gives to individual waiting servants equal opportunities to prove their loyalty and diligence in his absence. It is now that those left behind, as obscure traders, exhibit their true qualities, their fitness of character to qualify for nobler positions of distinction and authority in the coming Kingdom.

The nobleman will be looking for growing maturity, as the waiting servants make their calling and election sure.

The Apostle Peter wrote in his second letter:

'...he (Jesus) has given us his very great and precious promises...For this very reason (Peter says), make every effort to add to your faith (to this basic one pound gospel asset of the parable) goodness...knowledge...selfcontrol...perseverance...godliness...brotherly kindness...love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' [2 Peter 1.4-11 NIV]

THE SERVANTS JUDGED AND REWARDED

The nobleman wished to know from each servant in turn, how much he had gained by trading his property. The command '*Occupy till I come*', is an individual charge and we will be judged as individuals, on the basis of individual performance, as the Apostle Paul wrote '*every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour*.' [1 Corinthians 3.8]

It is a mistake to think that all professing Christians will be saved '*en masse*.'

Christianity is an individual matter. We each have to work out our own salvation and are answerable to Jesus at his appearing for the way we have managed our lives. [2 Corinthians 5.10; Revelation 22.11,12] Entrance into his Kingdom is not assured but depends on personal effort and identification with the teaching and commandments placed on his servants by the nobleman, their future judge. Paul wrote about the materials that can be used for building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and he warned the builder that *'his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.'* [1 Corinthians 3.13,14 NIV]

TEN AND FIVE CITIES



The 'garden of Gethsemane' as it is today

When Jesus met with his disciples in Jerusalem on the night of his arrest in the garden, he encouraged them with the promise:

'...I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'
[Luke 22.29,30]

Similarly, in the parable, the two faithful servants are rewarded with authority over ten and five cities. Theirs was to be a literal inheritance of the earth, rulership over differing sized districts of this kingdom to be presided over by the nobleman, the appointed king.

How the first two servants were rewarded was in direct proportion to the accumulation of profit, gained from the original pound. Both servants started

out with the same one pound asset; the first achieved the best possible improvement - a tenfold increase, while the second gained five pounds. These different degrees of improvement, using the same opportunities, are reflected in the gradations of the final reward, varying ranks of honour and authority - rule over ten and five cities respectively. [For similar teaching in the parable of the sower see Mark 4.20]

The Proverbs tell us, '*Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings.*' [Proverbs 22.29] For the initial pound to gain ten pounds by trading, it was necessary for the first servant to work exceptionally hard. We can say that the gift entrusted to him came to dominate his life. All other considerations were made subservient to the prime objective, as Jesus put it, '*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*' [Matthew 6.33] Every trading opportunity was turned to profitable account which met with the approval of the nobleman who said, '*Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.*' [Luke 19.17]

His fidelity and perseverance in the seemingly small matters of everyday living, showed that he was worthy to receive the king's favour and was fit to be elevated from a mere servant to high office and responsibility in the political constitution of the kingdom. His example, commended by the nobleman, illustrates the need for continual faithfulness, as the Apostle Paul writes:

'We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.' [Hebrews 6.11,12 NIV]

THE WICKED SERVANT

The third servant, condemned by the nobleman as '*thou wicked servant*' [Luke 19.22] failed to occupy properly the time spent waiting for his master's return. Not that he had squandered the money in riotous living, after the example of the prodigal son in another parable. [Luke 15.13] '*Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.*' [Luke 19.20] To avoid loss or damage he had carefully concealed the money out of harm's way. The solitary pound, secreted away in a napkin, became a 'frozen asset' from a business point of view and of little value. Neglected in this way it was impossible for the servant

to make any profit. Certainly, had the incident occurred in inflationary times, the unused coin would soon drop in value from its initial worth.

When he sought to justify his caution we learn why the condemned servant out of a sense of duty, performed the bare minimum. He gave a disappointingly negative response to the challenge offered, by having custody of the nobleman's goods. He said:

'For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.'
[Luke 19.21]

His excuse was a mistaken fear of what he saw as the harsh, unreasonable austerity of his Lord. The alleged exploitation of suppressed servants gave no encouragement for hard work, or for proper business management.

The man stood condemned by the words of his own self-defence. As the nobleman pointed out, even if such a harsh view of himself was correct, surely basic prudence should have compelled the servant to deposit the money in a bank, there to make at least a minimal investment gain from interest earned. By disregarding the charge to '*Occupy till I come*', he had refused to run any risk, or to inconvenience himself in any way. Out of fear and indolence he did nothing, and at the finish he lost all. The bystanders were told to '*Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.*' [Luke 19.24] By already proving himself capable of taking on even greater responsibilities, the first servant was further rewarded with the gift of the unused pound.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

The end of the wicked servant emphasises the importance of having a balanced knowledge and appreciation of the ways and character of both Jesus Christ, the nobleman soon to return, and also his Heavenly Father, from whom Jesus receives the kingdom. Right conduct will be our positive response to the privileges bestowed on those who now serve in the nobleman's house, trading with his goods. The nobleman inspires loyalty and diligence from his waiting servants, because of their indebtedness to him for giving to them all, the same priceless hope of elevation to an inheritance in his kingdom:

'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.' [2 Corinthians 5.14,15]

A useless, self-centred existence is not what Paul means when he urges that we should live unto Christ. Like those who used the money to good advantage in the parable, we need to make our lives productive, *'That (we) might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.'* [Colossians 1.10] By diligent service and application, the first two servants increased the original asset of one pound. We also gain the same fulfilment in our lives, by total commitment to the challenge of trading in the goods which belong to our Master. He says to his servants today, *'Occupy till I come.'*

If we are lazy and complacent, if we do nothing, then we shall finish up as failures, our lives showing a nil profit, when the account of our service is reviewed by the judge. As the nobleman tells those present at the final reckoning:

'I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.' [Luke 19.26]

All the prophetic signs tell us that the kingdom of God will very soon appear. For this reason the parable of the nobleman has a particular message for those awaiting the nobleman's return today.

Wise are those who heed the instruction of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' [Ephesians 5.15-17]

Duncan Cooke
Redhill, Surrey

BIBLE TRUTHS - The Felix Coin

AMONG THE ITEMS that archaeologists love to find in their excavations of ancient cities are coins! The coin usually gives a positive date to the time of occupation of a site. The coin we show here is the one struck and circulated in AD 59 by Felix who was the procurator or governor of Judaea from AD 52 to AD 59. The name of Felix is brought to our notice in the Bible, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, [Acts 23.24-35; 24.1-27] as the Roman ruler based in Caesarea at the time the Apostle Paul was detained and accused of sedition by his fellow Jews. Paul was brought from Jerusalem to Caesarea for trial before the Roman governor.

Felix was once a slave who had gained his freedom. His brother was also a freed slave and a favourite of the Emperor Claudius. His influence gained Felix the governor's post in Judaea. The historian Josephus confirms the record in Acts that Felix was married to Drusilla, a Jewess, [Acts 24.24] who was also the sister of King Herod Agrippa II, the ruler of the neighbouring province of Galilee.

The scriptural account of Paul's defence before Felix shows this representative of Rome as a corrupt man, who kept Paul a prisoner for two years, hoping that Paul would pay him a bribe for his release. [Acts 24.26] The history of the time and the accuracy of Luke's account in the Book of Acts, which have been questioned by the critics of God's word, have been proved absolutely accurate by 'finds' such as this coin of Felix, confirming his existence and position of governor of Judaea at this time. Other historical records tell us that Felix was recalled to Rome by the new Emperor Nero, in the same year as this coin was issued and replaced by Porcius Festus. [Acts 24.27]



For the reader of God's Word, there is always the reassuring knowledge that the writer of The Acts had close knowledge of the events and peoples of his time and the record, by God's guiding hand, can be totally relied upon.

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent

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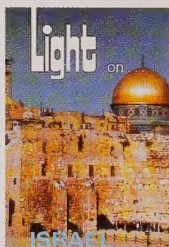
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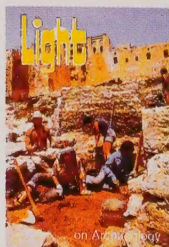
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